

Easter – A

Jesus' resurrection from the dead was something completely new – something that had never before happened since the creation of the world. During his public ministry, Jesus as we know had raised several people from the dead, including his friend Lazarus as we heard in one of our Sunday Gospel readings recently. Lazarus had been in the grave for 4 days, and so there was no question that he was dead, and Jesus miraculously raised him from the dead. But Lazarus returned to his human life; he was still subject to the suffering and death that are a part of every human life. Truly it was an astonishing event, an incredible miracle. Yet Jesus' resurrection from the dead was something altogether different and greater.

First, Jesus told his disciples in advance that he would rise from the dead. He announced ahead of time that it would happen. Second, Jesus rose from the dead through his own power; no one raised him from the dead as he did for Lazarus. Third, Jesus rose to a

new life, no longer subject to suffering and death. He rose both body and soul from the dead as we will hear in our Gospel readings in the coming days and weeks. He was no longer bound by the physical laws that govern our universe, to which we are all presently bound: although he could and did eat food after his resurrection, he could also somehow pass through locked doors. He could appear in one place and then in another distant place immediately afterwards. He was no longer bound by time and space. Again, Jesus' resurrection from the dead was something entirely new, a never before experienced event in the history of humanity.

And the writers of the Gospels make it clear that this was no symbolic action, that Jesus truly did rise from the dead, body and soul. They make it clear that this was an actual, historical event, not a myth or a legend. But the Resurrection, having happened some 2,000 years ago, while still just as radical and incredible as ever, is not new in the way that it was when it happened back then. What I

mean by this is that we've all heard about Jesus' resurrection all our lives – we are not hearing about this tonight for the first time.

Imagine what it must have been like for Jesus' disciples to hear about the resurrection. They knew that Jesus had died the death of a common criminal on the cross just a few days before. Just a few of them actually witnessed his death, most of them having fled in fear when Jesus was arrested. But his dead body had been taken down from the cross, and some of the women who followed him had then prepared his body for burial, embalming him with aloes and myrrh and wrapping his body in burial cloths, and then his body was laid in a tomb. He was definitively dead. And then suddenly, Mary Magdalene and a couple other women began to say that Jesus had risen from the dead. And the Gospels recount how Jesus' disciples reacted with incredulity at this news.

Mary Magdalene appears in each of the four accounts of Jesus' resurrection. It is interesting that the Lord chose her to be the first

one recorded by Scripture to hear the news of the resurrection, and to encounter the risen Jesus. Mary Magdalene of course had been a woman of ill repute, and so no doubt would not have been considered a credible source by most people. And yet the Lord chose her. The so-called wisdom of the world would probably call for the Lord to appear to one of the leading officials – why not Pontius Pilate, or Herod, or one of the Jewish leaders like Annas or Caiaphas? Wouldn't they have been considered more credible? Wouldn't the account of Jesus' resurrection then have received official approval, and then belief in Jesus would have spread more quickly? But instead, in God's infinite wisdom, he chose to appear first to Mary Magdalene. This can teach us a number of things, among which is that the Lord did not see Mary Magdalene as the woman of ill repute that she had been – he had forgiven her; he had given her a new life in which her sinful past no longer defined her but really had become irrelevant. And as Jesus said about her, she

loved much because she had been forgiven much. Mary Magdalene began a new life when Jesus forgave her.

Jesus then appeared to his disciples, a small, insignificant group of people. His “inner circle” of apostles were likewise not the most credible of witnesses; none of them had any special status in the eyes of the world: they were common fishermen from Galilee, tax collectors, and so on. And yet the Lord chose them to be witnesses to his resurrection.

In today’s Gospel reading, however, Jesus himself does not make an actual appearance: like Mary Magdalene and the other disciples, we only hear about his resurrection in these readings. Imagine if we were hearing this news for the first time ourselves: most likely we would respond with incredulity or disbelief. And certainly, that is how most people who first heard about it responded at that time. And Christians remained a tiny, fringe group for multiple generations after Jesus’ resurrection. Most

people, if they heard about Jesus' resurrection, refused to believe in it, thinking that Christians were ridiculous and foolish to believe in such a thing.

Yes, the resurrection of Jesus was something entirely new and one could even say shocking, to the point that most people did not believe it. And yet the resurrection of Jesus from the dead is central to our faith: if it did not happen, if Jesus did not really rise body and soul from the dead, then our faith really is meaningless. And certainly even today many people think so.

But just as Jesus' resurrection from the dead was something entirely new, and Jesus rose to a new, eternal life free from suffering and death, so too does he desire to share this new life with us. So Easter is a time of new beginnings, and this is what the Lord desires to give us. I think it's very fitting that, at least in the northern hemisphere, Easter comes when it does with the beginning of spring. Although here in Michigan spring still seems like a bit of a

rumor. I've been hearing, not too far south of the Michigan state line, rumors of leaves on trees, people mowing grass, all kinds of things in bloom: new life.

And I also think it's human nature to desire something new: we like to make New Year's resolutions, we like self-help books, we seek out novelty. We might often long for a change in ourselves as well. Because our human nature is fallen because of sin, often this desire for something new manifests itself as restlessness or even instability. Certainly as we get older we experience the effects of aging and become ever more aware that we aren't physically capable of doing things we used to do, or we start to feel aches and pains that we didn't use to feel, and all of us, regardless of age, get sick from time to time and experience physical weakness. Who doesn't long to be free of suffering? Who doesn't desire to feel they did when they were young? Not to mention the desire to be free of this shadow of death under which we all live. And we all experience our

own spiritual weakness as well: I certainly heard from many people this Lent that they were disappointed that they weren't able to maintain the Lenten sacrifices they had adopted (and I am among those people). How many of us have bad or even sinful habits that we struggle to break free from? Wouldn't it be wonderful to no longer be governed or controlled by our weak human nature?

With Jesus' resurrection from the dead, this is what he offers us: the possibility of a new life. And yes, above all else, he offers us the possibility that one day, when this earthly life is over, he will raise us too to a new and eternal life that is no longer subject to suffering and death. And at the end of the world, he promises to give us new physical bodies, reunited with our souls. Our faith gives us this hope. But we can begin to experience a taste of this new life that Jesus offers us even now, even in this life. Jesus desires to liberate us more and more especially from our spiritual weakness; he desires to free us from our attachments to unhealthy, sinful

habits so that we can begin to live a new life of spiritual freedom in him. This is what Jesus' resurrection from the dead promises us.

Our part is to seek to renew our faith in Jesus Christ each day – and each day can be seen as a new beginning in Christ – and to partake in the spiritual food of the sacraments that Jesus gives us – especially in the Eucharist, Jesus' very Body and Blood, and in the sacrament of reconciliation. And every time we go to confession, Jesus gives us another new beginning.

Let us accept the new life that Jesus has won for us through his suffering, death, and resurrection. Let us invite the risen Jesus to live in our hearts today and every day.

- **April 5, 2026 at St. Mary's, Spring Lake**